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SUBJECT: THE AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALLS ON KEY SHI'A LEADERS ABDELAZIZ AND AMMAR AL HAKIM

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In farewell calls on Abdelaziz Al-Hakim, President of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Ammar al-Hakim, his son and likely successor, each admitted they had been caught by surprise by ISCI's anemic performance in the January 31 provincial elections. Allowing that ISCI would take away valuable lessons from the latest polls, the Hakims also complained of fierce campaigns against ISCI in the media, alleging that USG-funded Al-Hurra Iraq TV was among the stations that had unfairly attacked them. The Hakims reemphasized their commitment to maintaining open channels and cooperation between ISCI and the USG. End summary.

¶2. (C) In separate farewell calls with Ammar al-Hakim on February 9 and his father Abdelaziz al-Hakim on February 12, each admitted to the Ambassador that ISCI was caught off guard by its relatively weak performance in the January 31 provincial elections. (Abdelaziz al-Hakim, ISCI's President, appeared tired and frail, having just returned from Tehran, where he is undergoing a course of chemotherapy for his cancer. Ammar, who is being groomed to replace his father, has had an increasingly high public profile and stood in for his father for much of the recent campaigning.)

¶3. (C) Of the two, Ammar was more circumspect about the elections results, allowing that ISCI had made some mistakes and was busy drawing lessons from the January 31 polls. Ammar also complained, vaguely, that the Iraqi High Electoral Commission had been biased and taken decisions in favor of ISCI's chief competitors, PM Maliki's State of Law list. Ammar also told the Ambassador that ISCI had been disappointed to see strongly biased coverage and attacks against the group on Al-Hurra Iraq TV, the USG-funded station popular in Iraq for its news coverage. Abdelaziz was more blunt: "We are surprised by the USG's media position," he told the Ambassador. President Bush told us he respected the role of people of faith in public life, and now we see Al-Hurra attacking Islamists in general and ISCI in particular.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador responded that all of Iraq's major political movements, save the Sadrists (who don't talk to us) had complained of Al-Hurra's coverage. The Ambassador also underlined that the USG, though it does subsidize Al-Hurra, does not play any role in the station's editorial decisions.

¶5. (C) Abdelaziz asked the Ambassador for his assessment of the direction of U.S.-Iraqi relations under the Obama administration. The Ambassador expressed his full confidence that the bedrock principles of partnership would remain solid. Pointing to President Obama's recent appearance on Al-Arabiya TV, the Ambassador said it was clear that the new administration was committed to deepening ties and understanding between the U.S. and the Islamic world.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador said that while he was sad to be leaving Iraq, he was leaving optimistic about Iraq's future. Both Hakims thanked the Ambassador for his commitment to Iraq, wished him well, and hoped that he would remain engaged in U.S.-Iraqi relations. "Your departure is your good luck and our bad luck," quipped Ammar. The Ambassador praised ISCI's steadfast opposition to violence and commitment to playing a constructive role in Iraq's democratic development.

Abdelaziz said ISCI would remain committed to democratic principles, and hoped to see "full implementation of the Constitution" in the coming period.

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